

# US grant helps aid a digital makeover

## Mattapan center gets 15 new PCs

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Computer users at the Mildred Avenue Community Center in Mattapan once slogged and sputtered through the Internet with the technological equivalent of a horse and buggy mired on a muddy road. The boxy, decade-old desktops stalled on graphics and had trouble running sophisticated software.

This morning those 15 antiquated machines have been replaced with dynamic speeders ready for modern information superhighway: HP Compaq 6000 Pro Small Form Factor desktops with flat LCD monitors, Microsoft Office 2010, and a suite of software that would make most techno geeks jealous. The new equipment, which includes a LaserJet printer, came from a \$1.9 million federal stimulus grant that will remake 48 public computing and Internet training centers across the city over the next year.

The money will buy 627 new computers for 15 community centers, 11 workshops in the Boston Housing Authority, and 22 libraries, which will purchase portable laptop carts stocked with Macs and PCs. The equipment will allow the public to tap into Boston's new broadband fiber optic network that links 190 facilities across the city. Officials estimate that it will increase computer use in the centers by 40 percent, from the current level of 15,000 weekly users to 18,000 weekly users over the next two years.

"This grant is a great example of Boston's continued pursuit of federal stimulus funds," Mayor Thomas M. Menino said in a statement. "I am proud of the city's effort to take an innovative, multiagency approach to effectively address the crucial need of digital inclusion for all of our underserved residents."

The mayor and other city officials will be on hand today when the Compaqs are booted up for the general public at the Mildred Avenue Community Center. Officials hope to have half the new computers online by the end of the year, with the remainder to follow in 2011. The federal stimulus money will help the Menino administration with its goal of making high-speed computer access available to all city residents, a push that has encountered some significant setbacks.

In July 2006, Menino launched an effort to blanket all of Boston with wireless Internet access by the end of 2008 through a nonprofit arm of the city, OpenAirBoston. The push, crafted by a mayoral task force, succeeded only in small patches; a square mile in Grove Hall, portions of Mission Hill, and the Fenway, Quincy Market, and along the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. Citywide coverage has not happened because of technical challenges and slower than anticipated fund-raising. Other large cities encountered similar difficulties, and Boston has continued to push to expand access, said Bill Oates, the city's chief information officer.

[http://articles.boston.com/2010-08-24/news/29315679\\_1\\_federal-stimulus-new-computers-task-force](http://articles.boston.com/2010-08-24/news/29315679_1_federal-stimulus-new-computers-task-force)